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High-speed rail wins funding

Tuesday, October 26, 2010

By JIM KINNEY

Business writer

SPRINGFIELD - The federal government committed \$120.9 million Monday to improvements for the passenger rail line from New Haven north to Springfield, part of an ongoing series of improvements designed to bring high-speed intercity and commuter rail to the Pioneer Valley.

"This is encouraging news today for the whole region," said U.S. Rep. Richard E. Neal, D-Springfield, at a news conference Monday at the federal courthouse in Springfield also attended by state Rep. Joseph F. Wagner, D-Chicopee, chairman of the state Legislature's Joint Committee on Transportation.

The \$120 million will pay to double track the line from New Haven to Springfield to allow trains to pass each other along the route. It will also pay for upgrades to signal and traffic control systems that will help manage the increased rail traffic efficiently and improvements to road crossings along the route, according to Neal's office.

Passenger trains might reach 70 to 80 mph on the tracks, Neal said.

"That's certainly better than the 10-mph speed limit in place now on sections of that track," Neal said.

Thirteen miles of the project are in Massachusetts, from the Connecticut state line north to Springfield's Union Station.

In the past two years, the federal government has given Massachusetts \$70 million to improve the rail line from Springfield north to the Vermont state line. Construction is expected to begin on that project in the spring of 2011.

It will enable Amtrak to reroute its trains along the Connecticut River. Poor track conditions now force Amtrak to take a long, slow detour through Palmer on the way to Vermont.

Vermont received \$50 million for work on the line in that state, and Connecticut has already received \$40 million for track work.

The Springfield-area track improvements will also allow Amtrak to relieve congestion along the coast, which is congested with Washington-to-Boston rail traffic, said Jeffrey B. Mullan, state secretary of transportation. The next step, Mullan said Monday afternoon, is to improve what rail planners call the "inland route" from Springfield to Boston....

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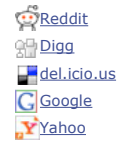
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